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THE WORTH OF SCHOOL MUSIC

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This manuscript was prepared as part of the publicity campaign of the Music Teachers' National Association which enlists the aid of its members in carrying on a movement similar in aim to the department in the Journal entitled *For Use in Your Local Paper* (see page 30 in a number of back issues, also in the current issue.) Prof. Farnsworth is chairman of our Committee on School Music Surveys, an excellent preliminary report of which appears in our 1918 Proceedings (price \$1.50 from our Treasurer, James McIlroy, Jr., Mt. Oliver Station, Pittsburgh, Pa.)—P. W. D.)

Two influences are especially apparent in the strong emphasis that is being put on the measurement of the efficiency of school work which is known as surveys. One of these influences is the rapid social change that is going on, which was vigorous enough before the war, but is now much more active. The other is the development in the science of psychology. From being a purely theoretical speculation about the mind, psychology is becoming a science of habit and conduct, capable, in many cases, of giving definite explanations of mental processes, thus contributing valuable methods for measuring educational accomplishment.

Like all strong movements that show their value, it would be natural for the tendency to measure educational results to go to extremes,—to attempt to weigh values impossible of being measured. Also school subjects offer varying adaptability for such treatment. Studies dealing with facts,—that is the gaining of mechanical skill, the application of knowledge to practical uses,—would seem to lend themselves to the methods of measurement, while all those subjects which are expressive in character, especially the artistic, that which combines outward form with the expression of inner significance, are difficult to gauge by the world's coarse thumb and finger.

We might say we will be content with measuring only the form of art. Even then we shall find that form can not be taken as the sole criterion, for we may have excellent rhyme and meter, and yet poor poetry. A perfect copying of nature with little art and music may be true to every rule of harmony and counterpoint, and yet not worth hearing. In fact, the most valuable impression of beauty may be singularly meager in its formal means of expression. Its very power is its suggestiveness.

Shall we then say that surveys shall be limited to the prosaic and scientific aspect of school work, and that the arts shall be left out? These very scientific and prosaic aspects of school work are the ones which can be tested practically and are brought up more or less to standards, while it is with the artistic expression that we feel the greatest need of determining what is really valuable and worth while.

And not only is there a difference between the practical and the artistic, but even between the arts there is a difference. The visual arts, through design and decoration, come in competition with work of the commercial world in such a way that the public is more or less able to establish some sort of standard. If we turn to music, here also we find a commercial product, but unfortunately this product serves no practical purpose, as in the arts of sight, but is purely for the immediate pleasure of the listener, and hence represents superficial reaction to what is heard. Furthermore, in school music as it is ordinarily conducted under chorus conditions, we have a production that stands by itself. There is little chorus singing outside of the school to give the public an opportunity of hearing

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the results and of forming standards of work. Even if they could, it is obviously unfair to expect the standard of the school chorus to be the same as that of the mature chorus. We thus have in school music an isolated art, offering its own technique and determining its own standards. It would seem, that of all school subjects, music required the most careful survey in order to find out what was being accomplished of real worth. Hence we see that while music is one of the most difficult subjects in which adequately to measure results of instruction, it is at the same time one that needs careful investigation more than any other, if we are to maintain high standards.

The simplest and most obvious way is to ask some musical teacher who has the confidence of the public and who understands the problem involved in teaching public school music, to visit the school and examine the work. The difficulty of doing this is that it is not an easy matter to find persons capable of serving as judges, for however impartially one performs his duty, the standards for such work are so various that there is little unanimity in accepting the estimate, and without such, there is little use in the judgment. The immediate problem then is, what results shall we expect from School Music teaching, and what is the relative value compared with the other subjects of the school curriculum?

In other words, what shall we take as a sample of what we want done, and on what scale shall we measure this sample? To illustrate, shall we say that children that can read from notation songs of certain difficulty, up to a certain standard proficiency in the eighth grade, are accomplishing what we wish, or perhaps even more? Or we might have still another aspect in the emphasis made, and say that knowledge and skill are more or less out of place in school music, and that we wish to awaken a hearty social feeling among the pupils and that if they commit to memory patriotic songs and songs of home and affection, and sing with enthusiasm and interest, that we are doing all that can be expected with the limited time and technical equipment possible to teachers, that are at our command.

While most people would agree in wishing some degree of efficiency in these three aims, we would rarely find two teachers who would agree exactly as to the emphasis to be placed. More of one, and less of the other would appear in the final standards of every teacher.

A plan for meeting this complex situation was suggested at the last meeting of the Supervisors' Conference in Evansville, Indiana. This plan was, first, to get a consensus of opinion of leading teachers of school music all over the country as to how they would value the various results of school music teaching, this value being expressed through a numerical ratio, and then after getting the average of the figures, to accept this as a majority expression of the value of the various aspects of school music work.

To give an example of the many points that were brought up, consider this one—the measurement of the total result of music teaching. The problem was

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divided into two parts, namely, the results of school music seen in school, and the results seen out of school. If we should allow one hundred for the total result, what per cent of the hundred should be allowed for results seen in schools as compared with results seen out of school? When one stops to think that after all, only a few years of the total life of a person is spent in school, is there not too much of a tendency to judge the work in school music by what is accomplished during this period, say, in some graduating exercises, or perhaps in ability to read at sight, and infer that if these are done satisfactorily, the pupil after leaving school will go on making use of music as he did in school? When one considers how the school work is under the constant direction of supervisors and teachers, and how little real initiative the pupils take, is such an inference, that the ordinary school work will bear fruit out of school, justified? Teachers who think that it is, would put the higher percent of the hundred on results accomplished in school, treating measurements of results out of school as of little consequence. On the other hand, there are teachers who feel that if music is to be valuable to the student after he leaves school, he must not merely learn something of notation, and take part in choruses, but he must have a genuine love of music awakened in him, that will stimulate him to take initiative both in listening to and making music when he gets away from the artificial props that the conditions of a school program make necessary.

At present teachers say, "Aim directly at the results you wish to get, and do not trust that the thing that will do will produce something else by and by." The whole question of education seems to be in this problem of teaching how to use effectively one's knowledge and skill to awaken real desires for the true, the beautiful and the good. Teachers demanding such an emphasis will naturally say that we must measure the result of school music by seeing what pupils do, not only in their homes and communities during their school days, but also after their school days are over in all the rest of their lives. They would put emphasis on the measurement of the results of school music out of school, and they would require a larger percent of the one hundred for expressing this result.

It will be seen that if some consensus of opinion among the leading supervisors of the country would establish an approximate percent of the value of these two aspects to be measured, we would reach a very important basic position for judging the more specific characteristics of the work. Not only is such discussion of value to the supervisors in viewing his own work, but to all teachers, school authorities, and the community at large, for there is hardly a subject upon which people pass judgment so purely on a personal basis, with little consideration for the facts to be considered, as they do in music, and nothing is more helpful, with reference to the music supervisor's profession, than the tendency that he is showing at present in demanding standards, not only for measuring his own work, but by which others may estimate its value.

He is leaving the rather technical requirements capable of being appreciated only by professional people and demanding that his work shall be judged by the purposes that it serves in practical everyday living. So much for the example. It will be seen that before the value of school music can be stated, some standards must be established by means of which judges can state their conclusion. This is one of the large problems that is now before the music supervisors' conference. It is important not only to all music teachers, but to the public at large.

Membership in the Supervisors' Conference means:—Admission to all Conference Meetings, Participation in all Conference Activities, a copy of the Printed Annual Proceedings, Regular Receipt of the Supervisors' Journal, but more than all else it means the privilege of doing your share of service for our chosen art.

MUSIC TEACHERS' NATIONAL ASSOCIATION MEETS IN ST. LOUIS

The fortieth annual meeting of the M. T. N. A. was held in St. Louis, December 30, January 1 and 2, at the Statler Hotel. Mr. Charles N. Boyd of Pittsburgh is president of the Association, and a number of our own National Conference men are prominent in its affairs.

The two dominant notes of the Convention seemed to be, first, that music is bound to play an increasingly important role in human life, and that this will be particularly evident in the reconstruction period that is now upon us; second, the American musician, and especially the American composer must be given a fair chance, but his work is to be judged upon its actual merits and not upon the fact that it is done by an American.

In his presidential address Mr. Boyd emphasized these points:

"With characteristic American tolerance and complacency we have allowed ourselves to be persuaded that the best music for almost any purpose came directly or indirectly from a certain country which has recently lost its reputation at a tremendous rate."

More U. S. Music Needed

"Beethoven and Bach, Schubert and Moart, and the others of that glorious company whose music is universal, should remain in the honor they so richly deserve, but in company with the rest of the world we should cast off the clutches of Prussianism and kultur. Let us make an effort to acquaint our communities with good American music, with the corresponding work of our French, English, Italian and Belgian allies, and see if the musical world will come to grief through deprivation.

Boyd also pointed out the mistake of holding aloof from the masses and confining musical activities to the pupil who was a student of some musical instrument.

Teachers Should Help

"Instead of holding aloof from these the musician should be either a promoter or an active participant if the plane of such music is to be raised; if the number of serious music students is to be increased; if popular alliance with worthy musical affairs is to be improved.

"For a large part of our population the summer evening concerts in the parks provide a real item of entertainment and recreation. Unfortunately the programs for many of these band concerts in both large and small cities betray a deplorable lack of ideals, and indicate a decided downward tendency.

Should Improve Programs

"It has been proven that the active interest of musicians can raise the standard of programs, and that the public will support unselfishly efforts of this kind. If the music teacher does not concern himself with such matters, and leaves them to the joint control of popularity-seeking bandmasters and politicians, programs will never be improved and standards will never be raised. Here is another evidence that the teacher should not confine himself entirely to the studio.

"The musician's interest in the community does not need to be limited to purely musical affairs. In the past this tendency to think, know and do nothing but music has been the basis for a lot of more or less deserved criticism of the profession. Today this objection cannot be upheld, for the musician is constantly found in touch with other interests."

The Conference on Public School Music had the largest attendance of any of the conferences. Professor Gehrken was chairman of this conference, and in his report as Chairman of the Committee on Public School Music he referred to the fact that the Committee on High School Music of the M. T. N. A. is also a joint committee of the N. E. A. and the Supervisors' National Conference. The general topic of the afternoon devoted to school music was "Theory Teaching in the Public Schools," and several exceptionally valuable papers were read. Supervisors who have classes in theory in the high school will do well to study these papers carefully when they appear in the Annual Volume of Proceedings.